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ABSTRACT

Contrastive analysis is vitally associated with foreign language teaching. A competent bilingual's intuition about the relationship of the forms in the two languages is the most important part of the valid data for analysis. By means of contrastive analysis major grammatical problems for American students learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) noun modifiers have been predicted. It has been found that patterns in the two languages are very easy if they have similar forms, meanings, and distributions. Grammatical categories that are absent or missing in the foreign language, but present in the learner's language, may constitute an easy pattern. If one obligatory pattern in the foreign language is set against more than one optional pattern in the learner's language, we have the case of a merged category. The equation of one obligatory pattern in the learner's language to more than one in the foreign language is a split category. The learner has one familiar significant pattern which could be equated to two (or more) significant or nonsignificant patterns in the foreign language. For the nonsignificant ones the alternate forms do not contrast but are in complementary distribution. (Author)

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Contrastive Analysis and the AFL Teacher¹

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Contrastive analysis is vitally associated with foreign language teaching. A competent bilingual's intuition about the relationship of the forms in the two languages is the most important part of the valid data for analysis. By means of contrastive analysis major grammatical problems for American students learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) noun modifiers have been predicted. It has been found that patterns in the two languages are very easy if they have similar forms, meanings, and distributions. Grammatical categories that are absent or missing in the foreign language, but present in the learner's language may constitute an easy pattern. If one obligatory pattern in the foreign language is set against more than one optional pattern in the learner's language, we have the case of a merged category. The equation of one obligatory pattern in the learner's language to more than one in the foreign language is a split category. The learner has one familiar significant pattern which could be equated to two (or more) significant or nonsignificant patterns in the foreign language. For the nonsignificant ones the alternate forms do not contrast but are in complementary distribution.

I. Introduction

The object of this paper is to predict, through a contrastive structural analysis, major grammatical problems that a native speaker of American English will encounter in learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) modifiers of nouns. Contrastive analysis has been so vitally associated with foreign language teaching, which draws heavily on the conclusions of such a comparison, that in the minds of many people it has no other usefulness. Contrastive analysis, or synchronic comparison is interesting for many other reasons. It is relevant, for example, to any kind of proceduralized system of translation, human or mechanical. Those engaged in machine translation tell us that the problems of machine translation are not

¹ This is a revised version of a paper originally read at the Middle East Studies Association meeting, November 1970.

primarily those of constructing an adequate machine, but those of linguistic programming, i.e. programming linguistic instructions for mapping the structure of the source language on to the structure of the target language. Apart from all this, however, contrastive analysis is an important theoretical question in its own right and is related to the whole problem of linguistic typology.

For any kind of comparison, we should have some common point of reference. Without such a point of reference we cannot have a justification for bringing two languages together; neither can we have a starting point. Modern linguistics considers languages as immanent systems. How can we find such a point of contact between two languages? Linguistic units are defined for each language by mutual oppositions operating within that language. So, in what sense can we say, for instance, that the phoneme /b/ of English can be considered comparable to the phoneme /b/ of Arabic? The answer is not very easy. Still, for phonology, one can find the meeting ground in the physical phenomena of phones, comparatively easy to identify and measure. Weinreich², for example, admits that though the English phoneme /p/ and the Russian phoneme /p/ cannot be the same, "the **physical** resemblance of the phone [p] in certain renditions of both phonemes in speech ... tempts (one) to identify the two phonemes astride the limits of the languages". It is obvious that this is not very satisfactory. As long as the two languages share roughly the same phonetic systems, or the inventory of phone types, one can go ahead and show the difference in their structuralization. But it is equally possible that there may not be any

² Weinreich, Uriel, Languages in Contact. Mouton & Co., The Hague, 1966, p. 7.

sharing of phones, at least for some parts of the systems, between two languages. In that case, identity will probably be sought in terms of phonetic features, which is still in terms of some testable physical parameters.

For comparison of grammars, however, the question is still more difficult. How do we compare two grammatical systems? What do they share to suggest comparability? An obvious answer that suggests itself is that we make this identification via meaning. This seems satisfactory on the surface but there are pitfalls. "Meaning" has been a much maligned term in linguistics -- at least in some schools of American structuralism, and some linguists have tried to avoid it, at least theoretically. Those who agree to include meaning in their linguistic theory have to treat it as a part of the system, i.e. as a linguistic entity. As such, forms and categories in two different languages can never mean the same if meaning is a property of language. Meaning is in need of justification for comparability. It cannot be the source of justification for the comparability of other linguistic units.

Many linguists have considered this question of comparability in some detail, and some of them have provided theoretical support for it. It lies without the scope of this paper to consider those linguists' ideas, views, and problems. Suffice it to say that a native speaker's grammatical intuition about the speech acts is an important part of the valid data which an analyst must make use of if he wants his analysis to be complete, significant, and revealing. For comparative analysis, the source of the data is not a native speaker of one or the other of the languages involved, but a competent bilingual. It is his intuition about the relationship of the forms in the two languages that is part of the valid data of analysis.

II. Assumptions, Approach, and Method

In transfer phenomena, there is an effect of previously learned habits upon foreign language learning. The student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy, and others extremely difficult. Those elements similar to his native language will be subject to facilitation and thus be easy, and those different will be subject to interference,³ hence will be difficult. The differences between the two grammatical systems will constitute the learning burden. It is possible, by distinguishing those points at which the structures of the two languages concerned exhibit similarity and those points where they diverge, to predict respectively the points of facilitation and interference.

The work is a synchronic comparative study of noun modifiers in MSA and English. It is linguistically oriented; that is, based on the findings of linguistic science as they bear directly on the field of applied linguistics. It is a synchronic comparative study of the selected structures of the two languages in mind. It does not make any effort to impose any philosophical and logical rules on the languages or to pass any judgement on them. The analysis, using several different techniques, does not show strict adherence to any of the established models for the description of

³ "The term interference implies the rearrangement of patterns that result from the introduction of foreign elements into the more highly structured domains of language, such as the bulk of the phonemic system, a large part of the morphology and syntax and some areas of vocabulary (kinship, color, weather, etc.)." Uriel Weinreich, Languages in Contact: Findings and Problems, Linguistic Circle of New York, 1953, p. 1.

"By phenomena of interference I mean those instances of deviation from the norms of a language which occur in the speech of a bilingual as the result of his familiarity with another language, i.e. as a result of language contact." Uriel Weinreich, "On the Description of Phonic Interference," Word XIII, No. 1, 1957, pp. 1-11.

language. It is worth mentioning that by using different techniques of description incompatibility may develop, but it has been found that at least for the limited scope of grammatical phenomena selected for this study, as Gleason said,⁴ different descriptive techniques may not necessarily be incompatible. The following three procedures have been set up for the comparison:⁵

First Step: Locate the best structural description of the languages involved.

Second Step: Summarize in compact outline all the structures.

Third Step: Actual comparison of the two language structures, pattern by pattern.

We begin with the analysis of the foreign language and compare its structure by structure with the native language. For each structure we need to know if there is a structure in the native language (1) signaled the same way, that is, by the same formal device,⁶ (2) having the same meaning, and (3) similarly distributed in the system of that language.

⁴ H. A. Gleason, Jr., Linguistics and English Grammar, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1965, p. 86.

⁵ R. Lado, Linguistics Across Cultures, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1953, pp. 67-69.

⁶ Formal device includes: word order, inflection (bound morphemes), correlation of forms, function words, intonation, stress, and pause.

For the purposes of this study it has been found it is necessary to define the three factors - form, meaning, and distribution - more specifically because of the fact that the scope is limited to MSA modifiers of nouns. Due to the great dissimilarity of some of the structural forms of MSA and English, it is necessary to describe form on two levels - (1) the morphological level, and (2) the syntactic level. The morphological features refer to the shape of morphemes as shown in derivation and inflection and to stress, and show contrast between the forms similar in shape. The syntactic features refer to the simplest (or minimum) identificational features of the modification structure which includes, along with word order, the filler identification of the two elements - the modifier and the modified which acts as the head. By head is meant the nucleus of an endocentric construction. By "endocentric construction" is meant that the whole construction functions (or has the same distribution) as the head:

In subordinate endocentric constructions the resultant phrase belongs to the same form-class as one of the constituents, which we call the head: Thus poor John belongs to the same form-class as John, which we accordingly call the head.⁸

Meaning in this study refers to the grammatical and/or the semantic meaning shown in the function relationship of the modifier to the modified, the latter acting as the head of the construction. Examples: actor,

⁷ Lado, op. cit., p. 53.

⁸ Leonard Bloomfield, Language, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1934, p. 195.

victim, subject (e.g. topic as opposed to actor), object, purpose, etc. Distribution refers to the occurrence of a form in a certain environment or set of environments in contrast to all those in which it cannot occur. Distribution involves the function of the construction as a unit. Function here refers to the relationship of a form to the larger structural patterns of the language. Examples: subject (as opposed to predicate functions), etc.

After the description and comparison of each structure, the points of interference as well as facilitation for American students learning MSA are indicated. This is done from the point of view of (1) students perceiving the language receptively (henceforth referred to as reception) and (2) students using the language productively (henceforth referred to as production). The reason for this distinction is well stated by Lado:

The effects of foreign language transfer are not identical when the learner speaks the foreign language and when he listens to it. When he speaks he chooses his meanings and then produces the forms that in the native language would signal those meanings. In listening, he hears the forms, and attaches the meanings they would have in his native language.⁹

III. Problems: Levels of Difficulty

A. A hierarchy of the levels of difficulty has been set up. Patterns in the two languages are considered very easy,¹⁰ if they are similar, namely, if they have similar forms, meanings, and distributions, for the

⁹ Lado, op. cit., p. 59.

¹⁰ For an inventory of structural correspondences aligned in a hierarchy of difficulty see Stockwell, J., Bowen, J., and Martin, J. The Grammatical Structures of English and Spanish. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.

learner simply ~~transfers~~ the pattern of his native language to the foreign language. This study did not predict any very easy patterns.

B. Grammatical categories that are absent or missing in the foreign language, but present in the learner's language may constitute an easy pattern, for all that is required is control of the pattern having no equivalent in the foreign language.

Examples:

1. Indefinite a and some in English and $\emptyset$ in MSA: walad, kitaab, ta'aam, 'boy, book, (some) food'.

2. Positive adjective:

walad kabiir "big boy"

3. Modifier order:

kalb kabiir 'aswad 'big black dog'

kalb 'aswad kabiir ¹¹ 'black big dog'

4. The ordinals 'awwal and 'aakhir meaning 'the first or last N' and not 'the first or last part of N'.

'awwal dars 'the first lesson'

*'al-'awwal dars

'aakhir kitaab 'the last book'

*'al-'aakhir kitaab

5. The ordinals Caani - Caafir, 'the second - the tenth' if the noun following these ordinals is singular and indefinite.

xaamis walad 'the fifth boy'

xaamis bint 'the fifth girl'

¹¹ *indicates an ungrammatical utterance.

6. The intensifier kull "all, whole; every, each"

kull rajul	'each (every) man'
kull 'al-rijaal	'all (of the) men'
kull balad	'each (every) country, town'
kull 'al-balad	'the whole country, town'

*'al-kull balad

C. If one obligatory pattern in the foreign language is set against more than one optional pattern in the learner's language, we have the case of a merged category. This is more difficult than the absent category, for the student has to control the other alternate forms not needed and make the proper selection of the pattern that could be equated to the foreign pattern. There will be some form of extinguishing in this case. Examples:

1. Genitives: In MSA, a noun construct (NN) is used to indicate "possession". This form NN is invariable, and is obligatory. In English, two patterns are used to indicate possession: N's N or N of N. Examples:

kitaab 'al-walad	'the boy's book'
lawn 'al-kitaab	'the color of the book'

*'al-lawn min 'al-kitaab

2. The total intensifying quantifiers kull "all, the whole" and jami^C and umuum^C, which share the same meaning and distributional features of kull are difficult patterns to native speakers of American English. All in English does not share the same distributional features with whole.

kull 'al-waqt	'all the time, the whole time'
kull 'al-balad	'all the city, the whole city'
*'al-kull waqt	
*'al-kull balad	

But there is facilitation in the use of all:

kull 'al-'ayyaam	'all (of) the days'
kull 'al-buyuut	'all (of) the houses'

D. The equation of one obligatory pattern in the learner's language to more than one in the foreign language is a split category. The learner has one familiar significant pattern which could be equated to two (or more) significant or nonsignificant patterns in the foreign language. For the non-significant ones the alternate forms do not contrast but are in complementary distribution; that is, where one form occurs, the other form does not.

Examples:

1. Demonstratives: In MSA, a demonstrative pronoun may be preposed or postposed, and in either case it precedes or follows a specified definite noun and agrees with it in gender, number, and case:

haaḏa 'al-kitaab	
or	'this book'
'al-kitaab haaḏa	
haaḏihii 'al-jaami ^{Ca} T	
or	'this university'
'al-jaami ^{Ca} T haaḏihii	

This is a very difficult structure. On the reception level, haaḏa 'al-kitaab tends to be equated with 'this is the book'. For production an American student faces differences in definiteness

and gender, which are absent in the English constructions. Forms such as the following have been produced:

*haaḍa kitaab	'this book'
*haaḍa madrasat	'this school'

Conversely, haaḍa walad is perceived as *'this boy'. In a construction like haaḍa walad, 'this is a boy', haaḍa 'this' occurs as an independent noun-head of the noun phrase, which is the entire subject of the sentence.

2. The cardinal numerals waahid 'one' and 'iḡnaan 'two' in MSA are obligatorily postposed to N, and show full agreement with it. Other cardinal numerals can be either preposed or postposed, and there are problems of gender, number, case, and definiteness. The following constructions are likely to be produced:

*waahid kitaab	'one book'
*iḡnaan kitaab	'two books'
*ḡalaaḡ kitaab	'three books'
*xamsat banaat	'five girls'

IV. Conclusion

Differences between the structures of MSA noun modifiers, and the corresponding English structures were found to be many. Among the MSA noun modifiers discussed in this study that are obligatorily preposed are the intensifying quantifier kull 'every, each', and the article prefix 'al-'. Those that are obligatorily postposed are: positive adjectives, participles, the cardinals waahid 'one' and 'iḡnaan 'two',

the ordinals 'al-haadif Cafar - 'al-taasi^C Cafar 'the eleventh - the nineteenth', and 'al-ciruun, 'al-ḡalaaḡuun etc. 'the twentieth, the thirtieth' etc., and the second noun in a noun compound. The rest of the modifiers are optionally preposed or postposed, e.g., the intensifier kull 'all, whole,' fractions, superlative adjectives ... etc. Among these modifiers some require no change in form if they are shifted to a post-nominal position, e.g., cardinals 3-10 and demonstrative pronouns. Some others do require a change in form and they either show full agreement with the noun-head or take a suffixed pronoun whose referent is the noun-head.

The grammatical subclasses: numerals, articles, limiters ... etc. are not the same in the two languages. MSA has no category like the predeterminer of English, nor does it have in its system a separate discrete category of genitive nouns.

The differences between the MSA and the English structures examined in this study are, nevertheless, within the framework of an over-all similarity in their categorical structure, inventory of categories, and deep grammatical meanings. Both MSA and English distinguish between the specified and the nonspecified grammatical categories. Both have some close if not very similar, deep grammatical meanings of noun compounds.

Synoptic comparative grammatical studies, contrary to phonological studies, cannot predict a high percentage of the mistakes that students actually make.¹² There are other kinds of interference not

¹² Robert Stockwell, A Contrastive Analysis of English and Tagalog. Part II, Grammar. Unpublished copy, University of California, Los Angeles, n.d. (mimeographed).

predicted by contrastive studies. One such source of students' grammatical mistakes may be wrong analogy rather than interference from their native tongue. Other sources of possible mistakes are non-linguistic factors like motivation and the age of intelligence of the student. This study has predicted only the problems that are the result of structural conflicts between MSA and English.

This study is of special usefulness to language teachers. The procedure followed in the comparison and contrast has predicted which of the structures examined will be more difficult for American students than others, and, to some extent, the degree and character of the difficulty. This has implications for both the preparation of teaching materials and tests, and for classroom procedure. Having through the contrastive method gained prior knowledge of the relative degree of difficulty of a group of items, the teacher will have a solid basis on which to distribute the learning burden. Otherwise, the result may be that one lesson is very easy for the student, while another may be very difficult. Such a situation might well result in a disproportionate amount of time being spent on the difficult lesson, with the student still feeling that little progress is being made. Lessons planned on the basis of the amount of interference, on the other hand, could be made of approximately equal difficulty.

Lectures concerning such differences should not, however, replace drill in the patterns or structures of the language. But the simplicity (or complexity) of the rules to be learned in the target language is an important factor. For example, an Arab student coming from MSA, in which adjectival and participial modifiers always follow the noun-head, will

have some difficulty learning a language where they always precede it, but he will have more difficulty in a language like English where they sometimes precede and sometimes follow, thereby creating a split in the branching properties of the modifiers. A split, it has been found involving a part similarity between corresponding structures of the target language and the native language, is more difficult than a straightforward reversal where there is no similarity at all.

As far as the area of linguistic research is concerned, this study is a mere sampling of the possible contrastive grammatical analyses of MSA and English. Its value lies in the fact that it suggests the potential usefulness of further such investigation of this phase of language. Such investigation, properly pursued, would require a team of researchers, composed of teachers and specialists in the field of linguistics and second language teaching be formed to exploit all possible avenues of contrastive analysis. The predictions made in this study regarding points of facilitation and interference for both reception and production were based on MSA as the target language. Emphasis has been placed on the problems that an American student will encounter in learning the structures of noun modifiers in MSA. To predict the problems of a native speaker of Arabic learning English a differently based comparison, with English as the target language, would be necessary.

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